



National Wildlife Federation®  
**CAMPUS**  
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**Colby College  
Waterville, Maine  
Spring 2008, Environmental Education and Outreach**

**BACKGROUND**

**Campus Profile**

Colby College, founded in 1813 and located in central Maine, is one of America's outstanding colleges of liberal arts and sciences. A four-year residential college, Colby balances a tradition of innovation with a commitment to liberal learning, and is a national leader in research- and project-based undergraduate education. The college enrollment for 2007 was 1,867 undergraduate students. Colby has 159 full-time and 69 part-time faculty members. It has long been a leader in campus sustainability issues. Its campus greening initiatives were formalized in 2001 with the establishment of the Environmental Advisory Group (EAG). The EAG, composed of 12 members (four students, four faculty and four administrators, including the Vice President for Administration and Treasurer, the Director of Physical Plant, the Environmental Program Manager, and the Director of Safety), advises the President and the college community on issues related to environmental stewardship of the campus. The Environmental Studies Program, one of the oldest in the nation, works collaboratively with the EAG and other campus organizations to help promote and conduct greening projects and to provide a curricular connection to these efforts.

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**GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**Goals**

Colby is a national leader in adopting sustainable practices and has been recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency and State of Maine for its commitment to environmental stewardship, both in academic programs and in practices adopted on campus. With Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified green buildings, green dining halls, 100 percent green electricity purchases,

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environmentally friendly electricity production, resource conservation practices and other initiatives, Colby is pursuing a multifaceted approach to campus greening (see: [www.colby.edu/green/](http://www.colby.edu/green/)).

Members of the Colby College community, both individually and institutionally, work to find ways to reduce the college's impact on the local and global environments. Commencement is a major event each year when families can celebrate the accomplishments of students and a chance for families to observe the college that their children have attended for four years. In the fall of 2007, Alaina Clark and Professor Russell Cole proposed to the EAG that hosting a Green Graduation could be an excellent opportunity to showcase Colby's sustainable initiatives and educate the wider community about living more sustainability. The plan for Colby's first formal Green Graduation emerged from Clark's honors work in environmental studies.

The first step toward implementing this idea was to investigate the components of green graduations held on other campuses. The next step was to identify the variety of components necessary for a successful graduation event on this campus, and then to determine how to enhance these components by adding as many sustainable features as possible. A committee was assembled that included the key commencement organizers to plan Colby's first formal Green Graduation.

Throughout the planning process, Colby adhered to its core values of sustainability and resource conservation. This event was a visible and positive contribution to the worldwide effort to reduce carbon emissions and to help mitigate the negative impacts of climate change. Importantly, this event helped raise awareness of this global problem, and educated participants and guests in ways to make in their live styles more sustainable.

The goals of Colby's first Green Graduation were to:

- infuse sustainability into all commencement activities;
- reduce the college's carbon footprint during commencement activities;
- maximize opportunities for sustainability education and raising awareness of issues related to climate change and resource conservation;
- use experiences from the Green Graduation as a platform to further expand Colby's sustainability efforts throughout the year, leading by example to foster environmental stewardship.

### **Accomplishments**

To achieve the goals listed above, the committee divided planning for commencement weekend into six categories and then worked to make each category as green as possible. An overview for each category is provided below.

#### Transportation

Guests traveled internationally and from all over the United States to attend graduation. They arrived in airplanes, cars and buses that contributed carbon emissions to the atmosphere. At a traditional graduation, these carbon emissions would be environmental externalities that were not included in the costs of the ceremony. At Colby's Green Graduation, we attempted to internalize these environmental costs by estimating the number of kilometers guests traveled by car and plane and then using the Native Energy carbon-offset calculator to determine the costs of offsetting these traditionally ignored emissions. Maps illustrating costs for offsetting emissions generated by travel from different parts of the United States and from different countries were displayed at the education booths. Information about reliable offset providers was also available.

Our cost estimate for offsetting the travel emissions for people traveling to and from Colby's Green Graduation was \$5,600. To help offset these emissions and neutralize the 464 tons of carbon dioxide

entering the atmosphere, the college purchased 1,300,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of additional Green Energy–Certified Wind Renewable Energy Credits at a cost of \$6,000. These credits were intended to offset both the estimated travel-generated emissions of the guests and other graduation-related activities. Purchasing renewable energy credits for the Green Graduation helped Colby to raise awareness that carbon emission reductions and purchasing offsets are two actions that mitigate climate change.

### Dining Services

Since 2005, Colby's dining services have traditionally served commencement weekend dinners that included as much local food as was available. Additional greening components were added this spring, including: All petroleum-based plastic flatware was replaced by compostable flatware (Spudware®). Plastic cups were replaced by a compostable cold cup (Natureworks®) that looks like plastic, but breaks down easily with high moisture and heat. The plates (Chinet®) were made of 100 percent recycled and compostable molded fiber. The lunch menus were designed so that every item served with the exception of coffee creamers and the outer tea bags could be composted. Organic and fair-trade coffee was served exclusively. Locally produced soda and beer were served in kegs, eliminating can and bottle waste. Washing stations with spray bottles of lemon water and compostable paper towels were set up, replacing packaged wet naps at the lobster bake. The menus at a sustainable dinner celebrating honorary-degree recipients were printed on handmade paper containing seeds. Guests were encouraged to take their menus home and plant them. A listing of the local farms and vendors providing food for the dinner were printed on the menu.

### Facilities and Energy Use

Many aspects of graduation weekend at Colby College were already environmentally friendly. The college contracts with Constellation Energy to purchase 100 percent green electricity. Of the total electrical demand at Colby, 91 percent of this demand is met by hydroelectric, biomass or wind sources; the remaining 9 percent is cogenerated at the steam plant on campus. For the Green Graduation, we looked for additional ways to make the facility and energy use more sustainable. Biodegradable latex balloons were used in place of mylar or foil balloons as decorations at the ball. Helium-filled-balloon table decorations were held in place by cans of food instead of plastic weights. The canned food was later donated to a local soup kitchen. Energy-efficient LED lights were used in place of incandescent bulbs. The use of fresh-cut flowers was dramatically reduced. Instead, 50 potted plants were leased only for the weekend; an additional 65 potted plants were purchased then either planted on campus or sold to Colby employees. Profits from the plant sale were designated for next year's Green Graduation.

### Recycling

Colby has been recycling since 1989. Major events such as commencement are opportunities to promote recycling and educate the public about the benefits of recycling and buying recycled products. Recycling initiatives included recycling stations that were available at all commencement-weekend events. Green Team members were present at these stations during major events to raise awareness and help guests recycle. Educational signs were displayed at the recycling stations. Composting efforts were also expanded beyond the dining halls to include all major picnics and meals. All written materials (except for the diplomas, which were already ordered) were printed on 100 percent recycled paper.

### Publicity and Publications

Announcing information regarding graduation weekend events provided another opportunity for discussing greening initiatives. Publicity for the Green Graduation occurred through a pre-commencement announcement to the Colby community by President William Adams. This helped to generate awareness and appreciation for the college's environmental initiatives. Mailings to parents were reduced in comparison to previous years. Messages were printed on recycled, chlorine-free paper. A webpage also linked to the main college commencement webpage

([www.colby.edu/green/GreenGraduation/GreenGrad.html](http://www.colby.edu/green/GreenGraduation/GreenGrad.html)) and described the sustainable initiatives occurring at the Green Graduation. Information regarding other campus sustainability projects was also linked to this page.

Fewer mailings and more electronic communications were used. In addition, narrower margins and more efficient space use resulted in a commencement program that was two double-sided pages shorter than last year's, saving money as well as paper. The programs were printed using soy ink on recycled paper.

### Rescue

At the end of every academic year when students move out of the dormitories, unwanted lamps, clothes, couches and other room items are left behind. Instead of entering the solid waste flow, most of these items are collected for donation to local charities or for resale to incoming students in the fall by Colby's RESCUE program (Recycle Everything Save Colby's Usable Excess). This program began in 2002 and has become popular with students. RESCUE removes approximately 10 tons of waste from the waste stream annually. Signs about RESCUE increased guest awareness of ways that Colby promotes reusing and recycling materials. Proceeds from the fall RESCUE sale will fund student interns who work on campus greening initiatives during the academic year.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Commencement is a major campus event, and many administrative units are involved in planning the weekend activities. Understanding planning responsibilities and coordinating actions required numerous Green Graduation committee meetings and communications. At the outset, we had not realized how many small changes would be made (e.g., altering the size of the program margin, replacing butter packets with bulk butter, choosing the best color twine to make symbols of the event), but these little choices ended up being as important as the big ones in promoting the sustainability message.

Dining Services is committed to expanding the local food options on its menu for commencement weekend. Since graduation occurs in May when the supplies of local and organic foods from the previous growing season are almost depleted, it was difficult to increase the numbers of local and organic food items for the Green Graduation meals.

Composting at an outdoor meal for nearly 2,000 people can present challenges. We learned that for an initiative of this scale, we needed to be very deliberate about each item served and to consider the ease of sorting at the compost.

Having the Green Team was key to giving a public face to the whole initiative. Knowing that each member of the team would talk with hundreds of guests, it was critical that the team members were well-trained, reliable and dependable. To keep expectations clear to everyone involved, in future years, we plan to develop a contract that each member will sign stipulating their responsibilities. We also plan to hire a Green Team coordinator.

We were pleased with how broadly the Green Graduation was accepted by the guests and campus community. We attribute this response in part to early support from President Adams and Colby's Environmental Advisory Group. This support along with significant promotion leading up the commencement weekend helped the Colby community to understand and embrace the Green Graduation.

The success of the first Green Graduation has encouraged Colby to plan future graduations to be as sustainable as possible. In addition, the college is working to adapt the successful initiatives from the commencement weekend for use during reunion weekends and for other events during the year.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

President Adams and senior administrators were enthusiastic supporters of the Green Graduation. This event was a collaborative effort that would never have succeeded without the help and ideas from everyone involved. The core members of the Green Graduation committee included:

- Russell Cole, Environmental Studies Program Director, who envisioned the idea and mentored Alaina Clark's honors work.
- Alaina Clark, who worked tirelessly in helping coordinate the Green Graduation committee and documenting the process in her honors thesis, *Designing a Green Graduation at Colby College*.
- Douglas Terp, Vice President for Administration and Treasurer, who, as EAG chair, gave early support and funding for the project, allowing Alaina's thesis to become a blueprint for the event.
- Patricia Murphy, Director of Physical Plant, who played a leadership role in Green Graduation from concept development to implementation.
- Joseph Klaus, Associate Director of Dining Services, who used his eye for detail and commitment to campus sustainability to make the catered events even greener than normal.
- Jackie Person, Assistant to the President, who was responsible for planning many of the major events for the weekend.
- Karen Ledger, Scheduling Manager, who used her expertise in planning large-scale events to identify opportunities for sustainability enhancements and waste reduction.
- Kelly Wharton, Director of Campus Life, who helped the idea bloom through her connection to the student body.

### **Resources and Funding**

The Green Graduation was not a cost-neutral endeavor. With the support of the president and senior administrators, Green Graduation committee members were able to increase their graduation budgets slightly to support this important event. For example, dining services reported an additional \$3,000 cost increase resulting from greater use of sustainable products and increased labor for composting at the catered meals. The college purchased 1,300,000 kWh of additional Green Energy–Certified Wind Renewable Energy Credits at the cost of \$6,000 to help offset emissions related to the Green Graduation.

### **Community Outreach and Education**

Informing the students and their families about Colby's greening efforts and ways that they can make their lives more sustainable was a key goal of this event. Sustainability initiatives were made more visible by:

- Circulating a petition among seniors to generate interest in making the 2008 commencement more environmentally sustainable.
- Recruiting a group of students (the Green Team) to educate guests about Green Graduation initiatives and to help implement initiatives when needed (e.g., composting at the catered events, staffing education booths). In exchange, the students were given free room and board during senior week and commencement weekend.

- The Green Team made more than 2,000 “show your green” symbols out of green twine. These were handed out to trustees, honorary-degree recipients, President Adams, faculty members, administrators, staff, parents and graduates and worn throughout the weekend.
- The Green Team wore bright green “Green Team” T-shirts making them highly visible,
- Education booths were set up at all major events. Posters, cardboard binders with product cuts and small handouts describing the various components of Green Graduation were available at these locations. Information about Colby’s green energy contract and how individuals can purchase green electricity and carbon offsets was also available.
- A videographer was hired to record components of Green Graduation. We will use the footage to make a video of the planning process and the event. The video will be a tool to showcase sustainability on campus and used as a record of Colby’s first formal Green Graduation.

### **Campus Climate Action: Your School’s Carbon Footprint**

Colby has made great strides in sustainability in recent years. For example, since 1998 we have used cogenerated electricity, which now accounts for 9 percent of the electricity we use annually, and we have purchased 100 percent renewable electricity since 2005. In addition, Colby has already met the Maine Governor’s Carbon Challenge, which stipulated that by 2010 we should reduce our emissions from 1990 levels by 9 percent on a per-square-foot basis. Colby has reduced emissions by three times that amount (27 percent) two years before the deadline. President Adams has signed the American Colleges and University Presidents Climate Commitment, and our Environmental Advisory Group is working on a plan to meet the goals of this commitment. To support Colby’s goal of carbon neutrality, we maintain a detailed greenhouse gas inventory model. Green Graduation illustrates Colby’s goal of leading by example to foster environmental stewardship and raise awareness about the critical issues of climate change and resource conservation.

### **National Wildlife Federation’s Campus Ecology® Program**

The collection of case studies featured on the National Wildlife Federation’s Campus Ecology website has been an effective and efficient way to learn about successful campus greening efforts across the country. The Campus Ecology Program staff was a knowledgeable resource when writing summaries of our greening initiatives.

### **CLOSING COMMENT**

Researching, planning and executing this event has been a tremendous learning opportunity for those involved. We have identified a few lessons learned in an effort to make next year’s graduation even greener. These include:

1. Start early. Planning for graduation weekend is very complex and begins relatively early in the academic year. Many people are involved in the planning process. Changes at the last minute are very difficult to implement.
2. Extensive communication is important not only to coordinate efforts, but also to inspire new changes and initiatives. Identifying the little things and incorporating these items into the overall plan is important.
3. The Green Team was a valuable component of the Green Graduation. A paid coordinator for this group will be considered for the future to help coordinate Green Team activities and train volunteers.

4. Undertaking a Green Graduation is a very effective way to raise awareness of environmental issues on campus, as well as to build considerable momentum for future sustainability initiatives.

5. As graduation approached, the Green Team was more visible, and momentum for the event was felt on campus. In the future, we will consider an expanded and earlier advertising effort to maximize enthusiasm and support from the Colby community for the green graduation.